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Students will respond better to grammar instruction if the traditional heavy handbooks are replaced with light-weight paperbacks, each full of practical suggestions and clear examples. Several inexpensive paperbacks are available for instruction in grammar and usage, spelling, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. Unlike the conventional handbooks, the paperbacks exhibit a lively, direct, conversational style which is appealing to students. Also, many of them provide answers to exercises and thus allow for both individual and small-group instruction. (A bibliography of paperbacks costing under a dollar is appended and five paperbacks for use at the high school level are singled out for discussion.) (SW)

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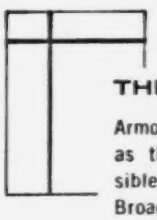

THIS MONTH'S COVER

Armor dented, hope undaunted, Richard Kiley as the **Man of La Mancha** sings his impossible dreams. The star of the current off-Broadway hit was photographed by Bob Golby.

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Paperback Grammar For Handbook Haters

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ONE JUNE, a New Jersey high school student willingly paid for "irreparably damaging" an English handbook. "It sure was worth three dollars," he announced as he dumped his book on the counter, "to put a bullet through all that grammar!"

Dull, dirty, heavy handbooks: enduring but unendurable. Page after page of rules like:

> "Under certain circumstances, a word ending in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel doubles the consonant before a suffix beginning with a vowel.
>
> (1) Double the consonant when the root (original word) has one syllable.
>
> (2) When the accent falls on the last syllable, double the consonant before adding a suffix, if the accented syllable in the new word is the same."[1]

Rather than trying to explain such elephantine proclamations or complex grammatical terminology, why not follow a paperback path that minimizes rules and terms? Besides steering clear of rules and terms, the best of the paperback authors such as Harry Shefter and Norman Lewis, have freed themselves from the leaden style of textbooks. Who would expect to open a *grammar* book to a chapter titled, "Arresting the *I Feel Badly* Gang"?

Not only do students who've been "ruled out" of school—the dropouts—respond to such a direct, conversational approach to grammar, but so also do potential dropouts, average students, the college bound, and adults. Whether I am teaching in high school, evening school, or college, I select not a grammar-and-usage handbook, but a 45-60¢ paperback in each of those areas:

1) grammar and usage (including punctuation)
2) spelling
3) vocabulary
4) reading comprehension (and speed)
5) writing skills

For the same price as a bullet hole, my students purchase five lively light-weight paperbacks, each full of practical suggestions, clear examples, and grade-it-yourself exercises. Pedantry is replaced by banter.

Any teacher wishing to replace a heavy handbook with selected paperbacks has several in each category to choose from. (For a bibliography of those under a dollar, see the end of this article.) At the risk of appearing to champion one author, let me describe the five books I use at the high school level, and why.

1. *Grammar and usage.* My vote goes to Harry Shefter's *Short Cuts to Effective English* (Washington Square Press, 60¢), which I supplement with my own "short-cuts." The book cover advertises, "There are no rules or terms of grammar in it." Fortunately, this is not exactly true. Anyone talking about grammar must use terms to identify what he refers to; anyone teaching grammar will want to emphasize the consistent patterns occurring in English. And Shefter does both. Note how he handles the grammatical stumbling block, "who-whom." After stating that "Who did you bring?" is now acceptable spoken English, he goes on to written usage. Without calling it that, he gives a rule: cross out and substitute:

> "To handle questions you simply substitute *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom*. Here's how:
>
> (Who, Whom) did you bring?
>
> *cross out* everything up to and including who-whom:
>
> ——— did you bring?
>
> Start the question with what is left: Did you bring . . . ? Now insert *he* or *him*, whichever fits. You get:
>
> Did you bring *him?*
>
> HIM-WHOM. Therefore, back to the original:
>
> WHOM did you bring?"[2]

Dorothy Lambert was English Chairman of a program for drop-outs at Point Park Junior College. She now teaches in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Here's how to take the green mold and the grouching out of Grammar. Dorothy Lambert points the way!

This rule—wherever *he* will fit, *who* will also; wherever *him* will fit, *whom* will also—works infallibly once students: 1) learn how to substitute, and 2) know already whether *he* or *him* fits the sentence. Thus Shefter simplifies, using students' pre-existing language patterns. At a cursory glance, this substitution-check method may seem complicated, but I have had students who could never recognize the objective case pick up Shefter's method in half an hour, and with some drill, get "who-whom" choices right every time.

This example of a Shefter short-cut exemplifies his method; as he states in his preface, this book "will have nothing to do with defining nouns, verbs, subordinating conjunctions, or past perfect progressives. Instead it will offer short cuts to establishing good habits by working with what a person *already knows* and has known."

> Another virtue of Shefter is that he's readable: "Who decides what correct English is? You do. I mean you and the millions of people who use our language. Let's say, a certain form, once regarded as bad, appears often enough and long enough in daily speech; in newspapers, books, and magazines; on TV and radio. After a time it finds its way into the unabridged dictionary and is eventually adopted by the authorities."[3]

Extremely informal, Shefter never talks down to his readers; rather, he bolsters them up.

Shefter is also invaluable for his short but plentiful exercises and his numerous review sections. Answers are provided so that students can work on their own. One of his most important chapters, "How to Compose Review Exercises by Yourself," helps students keep working independently. And he also includes sample civil service and college entrance tests.

One disadvantage a teacher may find with Shefter is that he is not complete; he covers less in his eleven explanatory chapters than a 643-page handbook with a glossary of usage listing 213 items. But what he does cover, he covers clearly and well; students can master his eleven topics. Some of the best are: "Solving the who done it!" (tenses); "Making a Good Match" (agreement); and "Trapping the Elusive Apostrophe!"

2. *Spelling.* Just as lively, direct and practical is Shefter's *Six Minutes a Day to Perfect Spelling* (Washington Square Press, 45¢) The book opens:

> "Good spellers are made, not born! Please write your name in pencil below: _____. You just wrote your name. When was the last time you misspelled it?"[4]

This startles the most reluctant reader to attention. Before he can put the book down, he finds one of the five case histories of poor spellers to be himself, and he's hooked.

Despite this striking introduction, Shefter's method sounds like the stuff found in every other speller: "See the word/Think the word/Feel the word/Say the word/Build the word." Yet his use of this five-stage plan is quite different. By "See the word," he doesn't mean to look at it over and over, letter by letter, but to focus on the particular part that causes trouble, seeing *calendar* not as eight letters but as *calenDAR*. He suggests underlining, capitalizing, circling, or red-inking important letters. Similarly, by "think the word," Shefter doesn't mean mental conjuring, but finding a key word or device to associate with the troublesome word, such as the sentence, "She screamed 'EEEE!' as she passed the cEmEtEry."

The core of the book is the 90-Day Trial section: twelve weeks, five words per week. For each word Shefter warns of trouble spots and provides "bonds" or key sentences as catchy

1. *English Grammar and Composition—II*, Warriner, Harcourt, Brace, and World, p. 57.
2. *Short Cuts to Effective English*, Shefter, Washington Square Press, p. 102.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
4. *Six Minutes a Day to Perfect Spelling*, Shefter, Washington Square Press, Inc., p. 1.

memory devices. Throughout the book are dictation paragraphs, reviews, spellagrams, etymologies, word lists for further study, notorious boners—for laughs—and "spellniks," additional devices to help master a word. Again, by the time a student has finished the book, he is ready to continue studying on his own.

3. *Vocabulary.* I vote here for a Norman Lewis book, either *Word Power Made Easy* (Pocket Books, 50¢) or *Thirty Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary* (with Wilfred Funk, Washington Square Press, 45¢). Although not all his word choices are particularly useful for the average high school student (*egregious? sycophant?*), his style and method outweigh the few rarefied words. Whether using the three-week or thirty-day version, don't be misled; most students will need thirty weeks.

Lewis starts with two simple principles: "1) words are the verbal symbols of ideas, and 2) the more ideas someone is familiar with, the more words he knows." His chapters focus on a central idea: kinds of personality, doctors, occupations, liars, insults, or compliments. By including study of etymologies, he adds more new words.

I find Lewis particularly useful because he presents a word *in context*, giving connotation and nuance as well as denotation. His context is an interesting, suspenseful paragraph:

> "Me first. This man's attitude to life is simple, direct, and aboveboard—every decision he makes is based on the answer to one question: "What's in it for me?" If his selfishness, greed, and ruthless desire for self-advancement hurt other people, that's too bad. "This is a tough world, pal, dog eat dog, every man for himself, and I, for one, am not going to be left behind!"
>
> "He's an *egoist.*"[5]

Because Lewis has given the egoist's pat phrases and typical gestures, the student can easily identify egoists he knows, incorporating the word into his working vocabulary. The student learns how to *use* the word *egoist.*

To further help the student, Lewis continues with a paragraph about an *egotist,* clarifying the *distinction between the two similar new words.* By comparing the two paragraph descriptions, the student can see the difference between those who are egoists and egotists.

Like Shefter, Lewis is always engaging. He starts each chapter with a teaser-preview, a list of questions, each of which when answered, gives the student a new word. One of these is: "What do you call a person who insists in complete and blind obedience?" (martinet)

Again, like Shefter, Lewis fills his book with exercises, reviews, and more reviews; however, these reviews are not directly repetitious, but shift the emphasis. After twelve different types of review—including matching sets, short-answer questions, fill-in blanks, etymological study, and pronunciation drills—by the end of a chapter the student is thoroughly familiar with the *feel* of each new word.

Teachers may wish to select various chapters in Lewis to concentrate upon, neglecting the study of podiatrists and chiropodists if they so choose, but he gives enough material to start anyone using a larger vocabulary.

4. *Reading Comprehension.* Whenever possible, I use reading laboratory materials. They offer a variety of selections on many reading levels, as well as a variety of methods for attacking the complex problems of poor readers. However, of the inexpensive paperbacks, Shefter's *Faster Reading Self-taught* (Washington Square Press, 60¢) or Nila Banton Smith's *Faster Reading Made Easy* (Popular Library, 75¢) contain many exercises to improve both speed and comprehension. For the more advanced reader, Norman Lewis in *How to Become a Better Reader* (Macfadden, 95¢) presents reading for subtle meaning, nuance, tone, and pattern. His concluding chapter helps readers to choose a field of interest, then set up and follow their own individualized reading program: the aim of every educated man.

5. *Writing Skills.* For a single book of general skills, I must vote for *Shefter's Guide to Better Compositions* (Washington Square Press, 60¢) As usual, he starts by reassuring the reader (quite clearly a high-schooler). Chapter one has such paragraph headings as, "You are not a beginner" and "You know what a composition is." He begins with "diagnosis"—why some of the eight sample compositions are better than the others.

The chapter, "Why *must* You Revise?" reveals Shefter's skillful use of examples to make his points. It begins with a facsimile of the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, including all the original Jeffersonian inkscratchings and arrows. Since Shefter realizes that you can't catch all errors on the first (and usually only) proofreading of a composition, he presents not one, but *four* checklists for revision, four sets of errors to look for.

6. *And for the Harassed Teacher.* I highly

5. *Word Power Made Easy,* Norman Lewis, Pocket Books, Inc., p. 19.

recommend Robert Webb's new classic: *Grammar for People Who Wouldn't Have to Worry About It If They Didn't Have Children* (Collier, 95¢).

For under three dollars students can easily equip themselves for English class with a series of five paperbacks! While students get a lively, friendly, readable style, the teacher gets classroom flexibility. Since all of these books contain answers to exercises, students can use them on their own: in class, in study hall, or at home. Classroom sets of four to six copies of each paperback can be used for remedial or regular class sessions, each student working individually in one of the five areas. Students can share books, one working one week on spelling, the other the next. Those who already read rapidly would skip that paperback. Those with mammoth vocabularies could try a more advanced book, while those with pinhead vocabularies use a simplified word builder.

In every case, both teacher and student will gain freedom. Those five paperbacks can be marked up, filled in (essential to practicing spelling), taken home, and most important, *kept* for future reference. At the end of a course when students have a chance to resell their books, most of my students stand in line, hesitate, and finally decide: "No, I want to keep them; these books have actually *helped* me!" With this decision, they have begun to build their own paperback reference library.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ENGLISH PAPERBACKS
FOR UNDER A DOLLAR

General, Grammar, and Usage: (including Punctuation)

Basic Grammar Self-taught, Gerald Gordon, Self, 95¢
Basic Facts of English Grammar, Howard Harrison, Collier, 95¢
Better English, Norman Lewis, Dell, 50¢
Better English Made Easy, Henry Thomas, Popular, 60¢
Blue Book of Correct English, Robert Dixson, Regent, 85¢
Blue Book of Grammar and Composition, Joseph Brain, Regent, 85¢
Concise Handbook of Better English, Roger Goodman, Bantam, 60¢
English for Everyone, Adrienne Foulke, Pocket Books, 50¢
English Usage, Grammar, and Composition, Dorothy Blanchard, Otten, 49¢
Grammar Self-taught, George Cevasco, Wash. Square, 45¢
How To Write and Speak Effective English, Edward Allen, Crest, 50¢
Mind the Stop: A Brief Guide to Punctuation, Gordon Carey, Cambridge U. Press, 95¢
New Way to Better English, Rudolf Flesch, Dolphin, 95¢
Punctuate It Right! Harry Shaw, Barnes & Noble, 95¢
Punctuate for Clarity, Robert Brittain, Barnes & Noble, 75¢
Short Cuts to Effective English, Harry Shefter, Wash. Square, 45¢

Spelling:

Blue Book of Spelling, Joseph Brain, Regent, 85¢
Correct Spelling Made Easy, Norman Lewis, Dell 50¢
Everyday Spelling Self-taught, Sarah Lewisohn, Self, 95¢
Handbook for Terrible Spellers, Joseph Jorday, Citadel, 50¢
How Do You Spell It? Kahn & Mulkerne, Dolphin, 95¢
How to Spell & Increase Your Word Power, Horace Coon, Signet, 60¢
Six Minutes a Day to Perfect Spelling, Harry Shefter, Wash. Square, 45¢
Spell It Right! Harry Shaw, Barnes & Noble, 95¢
Speller & Word Guide, Otten, 49¢
Twenty Steps to Perfect Spelling, Frances Hall, Bantam, 60¢
Words Most Often Misspelled & Mispronounced, Gleeson & Colurn, Pocket Books, 60¢

Vocabulary:

How to Build a Better Vocabulary, Nurnberg & Rosenblum, Popular, 50¢
How to Spell & Increase Your Word Power, Horace Coon, Signet, 60¢
It's Easy to Increase Your Vocabulary, William Morris, Dolphin, 95¢
Key to Vocabulary, Hal Vermes, Otten, 95¢
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New Ways to Greater Word Power, Goodman & Lewin, Dell, 40¢
Rapid Vocabulary Builder, Norman Lewis, Macfadden, 75¢
Six Weeks to Words of Power, Wilfred Funk, Pocket Books, 50¢
Thirty Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary, Funk & Lewis, Wash. Square, 45¢
Twenty-five Magic Steps to Word Power, Wilfred Funk, Crest, 50¢
Vocabulary Builder Notebook, Kilduff & Janis, Appleton, 65¢
Vocabulary Growth Self-taught, William Enders, Self, 95¢
Word Power Made Easy, Norman Lewis, Pocket Books, 50¢

Reading Comprehension (and Speed)

Faster Reading Made Easy, Nila Smith, Popular, 75¢
Faster Reading Self-Taught, Harry Shefter, Wash. Square, 60¢
How to Become a Better Reader, Norman Lewis, Macfadden, 95¢
Reading for Understanding Self-Taught, Martin Graham, Self, 95¢

Writing Skills: (Some listed under part 1, general)

Art of Readable Writing, Rudolf Flesch, Collier, 95¢
Complete Letter Writer, N. H. & S. K. Mager, Pocket Books, 35¢
Correct Letter Writing, Lillian Watson, Bantam, 75¢
Elements of Style, Strunk & White, Macmillan, 95¢
Guide to Better Compositions, Harry Shefter, Wash. Square, 60¢
How to Write, Speak, and Think More Effectively, Rudolf Flesch, Signet, 75¢
Key to Complete Letter Writing, George Peterson, Otten, 95¢
New Guide to Better Writing, Flesch & Lass, Popular, 60¢
Speak Better—Write Better—English, Horace Coon, Signet, 50¢
Stop, Look, & Write! Sohn & Leavitt, Bantam, 75¢

For Fun, in the *1066 And All That* tradition:

Grammar For People Who Wouldn't Have to Worry About It If They Didn't Have Children, Robert Webb, Collier, 95¢